

SIR LANCELOT OF THE LAKE

There came a time for Merlin to fulfil his destiny and leave Camelot. Sadly he said farewell to Arthur, leaving him to rule alone as king, without the wisdom of his truest friend. It was time for Merlin to sleep his long sleep, until the day comes when he will wake once more. Slowly, Merlin walked away from the court at Camelot and out into the night, where the Lady Nimue, Mistress of the Isle of Avalon, was waiting for him. She led him on a long journey, until at last they reached the court of Elaine, who was the Queen of North Wales. There he asked to see





Elaine's son, Lancelot of the Lake, so called because the Lady of the Lake took him when he was a baby and kept him hidden in her underwater realm for many years, following the death of his father, King Ban.

Merlin made Lancelot promise to ride to Camelot for the next festival and tournament of jousting, and to tell King Arthur that it was Merlin's last wish that he should make Lancelot a knight at his table. ←

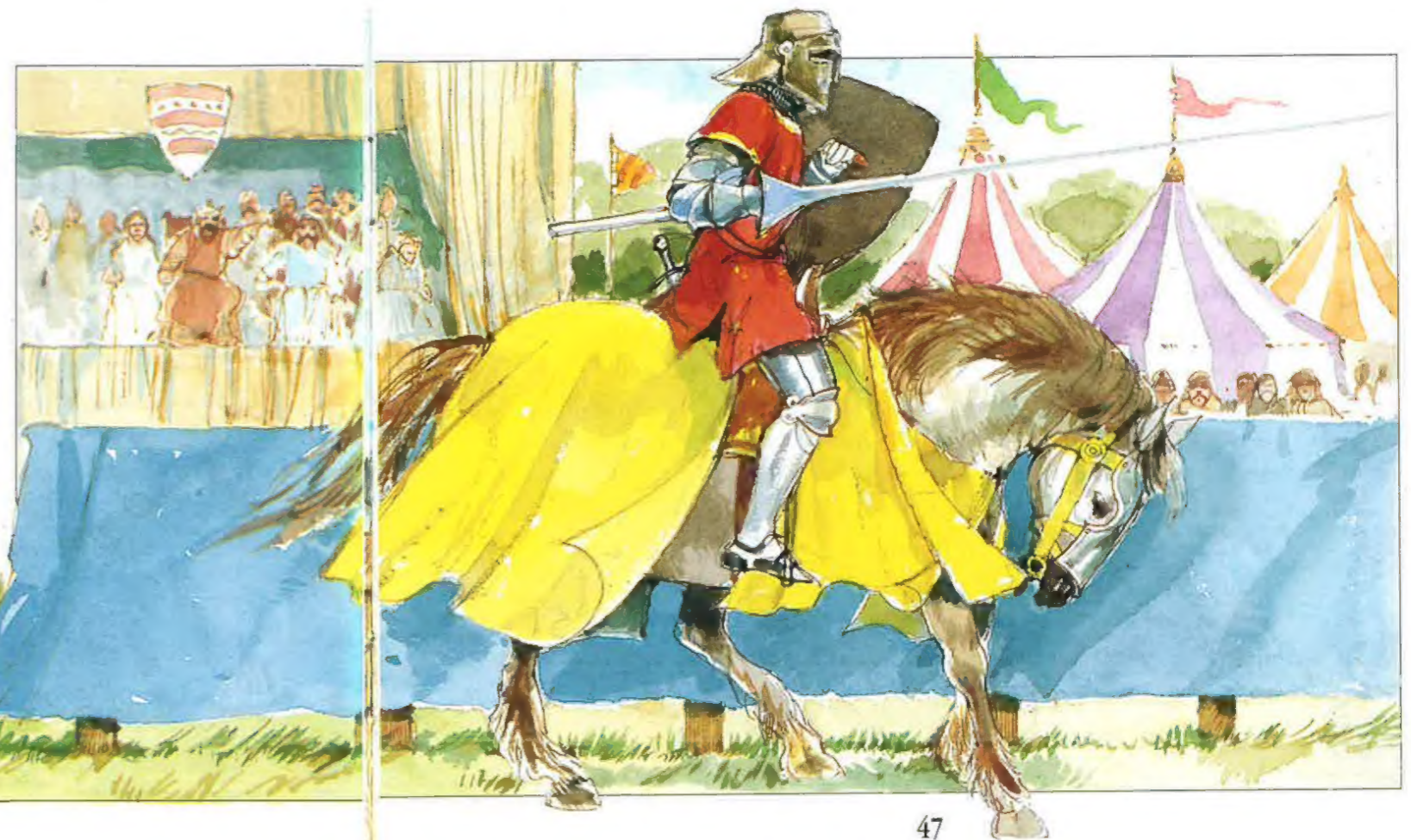
Merlin then slipped away into the night once more, and it is said that the Lady Nimue took him to a cave beneath her lake, where he fell into an eternal sleep from which he will only wake when Britain is in mortal danger.



And so it came to pass that, in the middle of the next royal tournament at Camelot, a mysterious stranger appeared in their midst. King Arthur and Queen Guinevere were watching the jousting from the royal stand and their curiosity was aroused by this unknown rider. His armour gleamed in the sunlight, but his visor was down and covered his face and, as he wore no colours or emblems to identify himself, he remained shrouded in mystery. —



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King Arthur welcomed him to the tournament and asked him to reveal his true identity, telling him that no knight should be ashamed of his name. But the stranger replied that he would first like to fight the bravest knights in Arthur's court, and only then, having proved his worth, would he reveal his name. Queen Guinevere was greatly impressed by this solemn and sincere knight, and asked Arthur if he might fight as her champion, since Arthur himself was unable to do so. King Arthur loved Guinevere dearly and was happy to agree to anything she wished, and so he gave the knight his blessing and instructed him to fight well, for the royal honour was at stake. In his heart, the stranger, overwhelmed by Guinevere's beauty, vowed then and there never to serve any other lady but her. This was to be the cause of his downfall later on, but that is another story altogether.

Out on the field, Sir Kay was the first to face him, determined to show that the strange knight was unworthy of such royal attention. "Here is your chance to prove yourself, knight with no name," he taunted. "Let us see what you are worth!"





Taking up their lances, the two knights rushed at each other, their horses' hooves thundering across the field. Skilfully, the unnamed knight swerved out of the way as Sir Kay's lance came swiping towards him and, momentarily caught off balance, Sir Kay went tumbling to the ground.

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Dusting himself off, Sir Kay disappeared, scowling, into the crowd. One by one, the best knights at King Arthur's court took their turn against Lancelot, and one by one, all were thrown to the ground in defeat. At last the new champion turned to face King Arthur. —

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"You have defended my lady's honour well, brave knight," said King Arthur. "Now it is time for you to reveal your true identity to our court."
Removing his helmet, the unnamed knight bowed low before the king. "I am Lancelot of the Lake, King Ban of Benwick's son," he said. "Merlin visited me on the way to his eternal resting place, and sent me here to be knighted and serve at your court. I was raised from a baby by the Lady of the Lake, who taught me many things, setting me challenges of skill and intellect which would seem almost impossible to solve. She taught me to be courageous, and worthy of a place at your table."



King Arthur smiled, overjoyed to have a knight sent by Merlin. Drawing Excalibur from its sheath, he gently touched Lancelot on each shoulder. "Arise, Sir Lancelot, it is a joy to welcome such a worthy warrior to Camelot."



That evening, Sir Lancelot took his place at the Round Table. His name had appeared on an empty chair beside that which was known as the Perilous Seat. That seat would only ever be taken by one knight, and that would be much later, at the time of the Quest for the Holy Grail.

Sir Lancelot became known as the bravest and most fearless knight, and had the greatest reputation of any knight at court. He was strong, chivalrous and noble, and his deeds brought glory to Camelot. King Arthur ruled wisely, fulfilling Merlin's prophecy. According to legend, he was the greatest king the world has ever known.

